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IMPLEMENTATION OF THE PROGRAMME OF ACTION FOR THE THIRD DECADE TO COMBAT RACISM AND RACIAL DISCRIMINATION

Written statement submitted by the International Federation for the Protection of the Rights of Ethnic, Religious, Linguistic and Other Minorities, a non-governmental organization on the Roster

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement, which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1296 (XLIV).

[11 March 1997]

1. The Programme of Action for the Third Decade to Combat Racism and Racial Discrimination is a vital effort by the international community to investigate and eliminate one of the root causes of human rights abuses - discrimination based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin. Paragraph 5 of the Programme of Action calls on States to ensure that the standards set forth in the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination are universally accepted and applied. Racism is present in virtually every nation in some form and new forms of racism and new means of spreading racism require the attention of the international community. Nonetheless, the system of apartheid in South Africa has only recently been

dissolved and its effects still unremedied, and acts of genocide and ethnic cleansing are recurring with tragic frequency. We therefore believe that it is especially incumbent on the international community to call special attention to and demand the elimination of racism practised in certain countries on a systematic and official basis against minorities, under circumstances amounting to, cultural genocide. Examples include the treatment of Tibetans by the Government of the People's Republic of China and the treatment of ethnic groups in former Yugoslavia.

2. The Convention prohibits discrimination based on race or national or ethnic origin. Article 27 also specifically prohibits a State from denying ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities the right to enjoy their own culture, religion and language. The People's Republic of China has ratified the Convention. Nonetheless, it continues to discriminate against Tibetans in employment, education, housing, language and reproductive rights. Moreover, population transfer is exacerbating discrimination against Tibetans.

3. Article 5 (e) (i) of the Convention prohibits discrimination in employment. Economic development policies in Tibet, however, are causing a huge influx of Chinese entrepreneurs and workers into Tibet. This has increased inflation and caused unemployment for Tibetans, who find that they cannot compete with ethnic Chinese for jobs controlled by ethnic Chinese. Tibetans are also being pressed into service to help build the infrastructure to support the rapid economic development of Tibet. Tibet Information Network reports, however, that the Tibetans are often not being paid for their work but are being pressed into service as a "contribution to the community". Chinese workers, on the other hand, are being paid regular wages. In addition, virtually all of the skilled jobs are held by Chinese, while Tibetans perform most of the manual labour.

4. In another example of discrimination, Chinese health inspectors in Lhasa recently closed private clinics and revoked the licenses of health-care workers, ostensibly on the grounds that they did not comply with regulations. The closed clinics were predominately run by Tibetans. When Tibetan patients complained, authorities retaliated by closing still more clinics.

5. The Chinese Government discriminates against Tibetans in education in a variety of ways. Tibetan and Chinese students are routinely segregated in classrooms and Chinese students receive better facilities and teachers. The Government has built new schools mainly in the cities and county headquarters towns. These schools, with comparatively better facilities, serve the predominantly Chinese urban population. In addition, Tibetan children educated in the rural primary schools are generally not given the opportunity to advance to the middle schools, again located only in the cities and larger towns. The numbers of Tibetan children in middle school and higher grows disproportionately smaller compared with ethnic Chinese children as a result of government policies.

6. Discrimination against the Tibetan language is most keenly felt in the educational system. While Tibetan children learn in Tibetan in the first years of schooling, knowledge of Chinese is required in order to receive

advanced education. In fact, Tibetan children who do well enough to advance to middle school are often taken to China to continue their studies, and most secondary schools teach only in Chinese.

7. Recently, Tibet Information Network reported that Chinese directors of the University of Tibet determined that the History of Tibet course would be taught in Chinese, even though many of the students and teachers are Tibetan and the course is part of the Tibetan Language Department. The University, founded to maintain and develop Tibetan language and culture, now no longer requires students to pass an entrance examination in Tibetan and virtually all of the classes are taught in Chinese.

8. Government meetings and judicial proceedings are now conducted primarily in Chinese. This is so despite official government regulations that were intended to promote the use of Tibetan in such forums.

9. Article 5 (e) (iii) prohibits discrimination in housing. Chinese settlers nonetheless receive preferential treatment for more spacious housing and facilities such as running water, electricity and sanitary systems. State housing units for government workers also benefit Chinese disproportionately because relatively few Tibetans are able to secure government positions. In addition, traditional Tibetan housing is being demolished to make room for modern concrete block buildings and apartments intended to house Chinese immigrants.

10. Finally, government birth control policies appear aimed at reducing the size of the Tibetan population. Tibetan culture traditionally, because of the relatively high number of Buddhist monks and nuns who do not have children, is disproportionately vulnerable to birth control policies. Even though official policy is not to extend the "one family, one child" policy to nationalities as small as the Tibetans, central government officials have allowed and encouraged local officials to implement such policies. What is worse, stated reasons for extending these policies to Tibetans include the desire to "improve national qualities" and weed out "births of inferior qualities" among ethnic minorities.

11. The discriminatory policies and practices of the People's Republic of China towards the Tibetan people are longstanding, well-documented, and increasing in scope. In August 1996, the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination strongly criticized the Chinese Government for denying Tibetans the rights to practise and enjoy their culture and to receive equal treatment in education and employment.

12. In the former Yugoslavia, the Special Rapporteur continues to report on persistent and systematic discrimination practised by police and officials of Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Serbia against minority groups (see E/CN.4/1997/9). These include efforts to enforce the ethnic cleansing carried out before and during hostilities in that region, such as by refusing to allow members of ethnic groups to return to their homes. We applaud the work of the Special Rapporteur, but call upon the international community to take

effective steps to prevent government officials in that region from carrying out activities designed to continue or reinforce ethnic cleansing carried on there.

13. We call upon the Commission to take note of the official and systematic discrimination still being practised in some States, such as China and the States of the former Yugoslavia. Only the strongest condemnation by the international community would be consistent with the mandate of the Programme of Action. We therefore call upon the Commission to pass a strong resolution declaring that the Third Decade will be devoted in particular to eradicating official and systematic discrimination against minorities in situations like those in Tibet and the States of the former Yugoslavia.